

October 15, 1965

In a speech on the floor of the House of Representatives yesterday, Congressman John E. Fogarty expressed keen disappointment at the failure of the Governor of the State of Rhode Island to take advantage of all the Federal assistance available in the fields of mental retardation and mental health. In his speech the Congressman stated:

"During the past three years this Congress has brought about a revolution in the area of mental health and mental retardation. The Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Center Construction Act of 1963 is a landmark in the history of a humane national concern for those afflicted with this malady. But the Congress found it was not enough to provide all the impetus needed. This year, we added amendments to the act to allow for the staffing assistants for mental health centers and we authorized even greater expenditures than had originally been planned for mental retardation.

I personally take great pride in the fact that as Chairman of the Appropriation Sub-Committee of the House of Representatives, I participated in the action of the 88th and 89th Congresses to enact these laws to provide funds to stimulate construction of mental health centers and mental retardation facilities. As you know, this legislation was designed as a stimulus. We in Congress have no interest in supplanting local or state programs with Federal programs. We left the next step up to the individual state itself.

Federal funds were available but they provided only enough to interest the community and state in attempting to find additional amounts of financing.

The Act and amendments require that a state plan for use of the allotted funds be prepared opening the way for individual communities to develop their own local plans for participation in the program, and as I see it, this is true cooperation between the Federal Government and State.

It is, therefore, with a great deal of sadness that I observed the slowness with which the Governor of my own State of Rhode Island has moved to avail us of this Federal assistance. Our citizens have suffered from lack of leadership in a field where dynamic leadership is vital. In the area of mental health, for example, our Governor's Comprehensive State Mental Health Plan recommends a permanent Governor's council on mental health with full-time professional and clerical staff. The plan emphasizes distinct features of the state; its small and geographic size and comparatively easy geographical accessibility to mental health centers developed within our state. And I must confess that it is a mystery to me why Rhode Island has not been in the forefront of this movement nationally. Already seven states have submitted Center plans which have been approved; four others are pending. These states with approved plans include two with the largest populations -- California and New York. If these two with their immensely complex problems

and broad geographic variations can act to take advantage of Federal assistance in the Center construction program-- so too can Rhode Island.

Specific recommendations regarding sources, methods, and levels of financing of mental health programs are lacking altogether in the Rhode Island Comprehensive Plan -- these must be provided, and soon, by responsible Rhode Island State officials.

It is just unbelievable that Rhode Island is dragging its feet so badly in this area. Costly or not, the Council's goals are clearly reasonable and these goals are urgent. Failure to provide care can result in more profound, more intractable illness. Each year of delay in providing such services produces its own harvest of despair and makes recovery and rehabilitation more difficult and expensive.

I have sought on many occasions to promote national programs built on the sound principle that mental health is public health and this must include both preventive and rehabilitative resources to reduce the burden of disability that individuals and communities must suffer. I urge attention to this principle upon the officials in my own state.

Mr. Chairman, our state officials are guilty of sins of omission. They have not pushed ahead to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. In Rhode Island I cannot understand this attitude. It seems to me that one of the qualities needed for true leadership is the ability to

recognize opportunity when it arises. Federal assistance in the mental health and mental retardation programs provide opportunity for those of our citizens who have suffered without the help they deserve. I for one would like to see qualities of leadership put on display in my home state."

Mr. Fogarty also commented on the fact that the Governor recently complained about the rates being paid Counselors in the Poverty Program. In this regard, the Congressman stated, "I am somewhat surprised by the Governor's concern inasmuch as the state minimum rate of \$5. per hour for certificated counselors is precisely the rate to be paid in the Providence project. The Governor has earlier approved other Neighborhood Youth Corps projects paying the same minimum rates to counselors. He has also approved an Office of Economic Opportunity grant to the Providence School system which provides a \$6.00 rate for counselors."